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ABSTRACT

This report contends that current university-based research and development activities investigating successful secondary schools provide an exceptional mechanism for coordinating all three aspects of assessing successful schools: legal compliance, student performance, and quality of school life. A typology of schools is proposed to account for the schools' basic orientation toward administration and instruction. Administrative processes reflect one of three belief systems--the bureaucratic-rationalistic, the political-organic, and the cultural--that describe the ways schools go about making policy decisions and allocating resources. Based on this typology, seven core studies are proposed that would address the following school processes: (1) organizing, planning, and informing; (2) resource allocation; (3) curriculum and instruction; (4) managing co-curricular education; (5) guidance services; (6) monitoring and evaluation; and (7) adolescent enculturation. The report concludes by suggesting that renewed attention to school assessment processes could stimulate collaborative management that continuously assesses current practice based on a systematic data-based profile of performance-related school processes coupled with an aspirational model of the school's organizational culture. (TE)

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ASSESSMENT PROCESSES AND THE MANAGEMENT OF THE SCHOOL'S CURRICULA

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The problem and prospect of institutionalizing the thrust of research in school success is, for us, best illustrated by an incident ascribed to Dr. Kenneth B. Clark during a meeting of the Regents of the University of the State of New York. In an effort to assure educational quality, New York administers a strong program of unit registration and individual certification and lisensure for all types of educational enterprises. The school registration program concentrates almost entirely on the school's compliance with legal requirements established over time by various governing bodies, such as the Regents, the courts, and the state assembly. When a former state commissioner of education requested that the Regents "register" a set of high schools, Dr. Clark asked how it was that the Regents could "register" a particular school when so many poor youngsters at that school were known to be deficient in basic skills and a large number of other youngsters were known to have left the school prior to graduation. In short, Clark challenged the rationale for the school registration process: on the one hand, the state monitored student performance, but did not hold individual schools accountable for its record, while on the other hand, the state did hold the individual school accountable for legal compliance with many specifications that concerned health, safety, and physical resources. Dr. Clark's query was prophetic. Symbolically, it signified an intensified effort on the part of educators to relate those processes that focus on monitoring student performance by means of state testing progams, the legal compliance orientation of state registration processes, and the voluntary accreditation processes that are school quality oriented, but are more collegial than inspectorial in nature. Interestingly, no one of the school assessment systems was, or is yet, able to incorporate all three aspects of assessing successful schooling: legal compliance, student performance, and quality of school life.

We believe that current, university-based research and development activities dealing with successful secondary schools provide an exceptional context and mechanism for coordinating these processes as supplementary systems that give local school administrators increased opportunity to manage the school curriculum in a collegial fashion.

The past few years represent the return of education to the national agenda. Both the appearance of a plethora of reports and the range of responses, from local boards, state assemblies, governors, and professional associations, reflect the nation's renewed interest in the quality of schooling. This continuing concern has two distinguishing features: first, the concern for the school as an institution, not alone for the individual youngster as represented by a set of test scores; and second, the sharper focus on the high school and how it differs in form and substance from the elementary school. Not since the post-Sputnik era and the policy studies of James B. Conant has there been such a concern about managing the high school curriculum.

Between Conant and the current concern for improvement in secondary school performance, school administrators spent quite a period of time considering differentiated staffing, flexible-modular scheduling, and similar innovations designed to make schools more efficient in anticipation of teacher shortages resulting from expanding enrollments. Administrators seemed to be addressing one major question, "how can we organize for instruction?" They also spent a great deal of time finding ways to provide meaningful programs for a significantly

differentiated student body, especially handicapped students, new immigrants with Hispanic and Asian origins, and other students who had previously not thought of themselves as high school graduates. In effect, the primary question being addressed was, "How can we achieve a minimum level of performance for all students?" In the interval, few administrators or researchers asked, "What should a high school graduate know upon graduation?" Even fewer empirical research studies tried to determine how local schools structured their program of studies to control access to courses; that is, few people asked, "How does a student get into Algebra I? How do students get access to the cultural capital of our society?" Managing the curriculum means asking these and similar questions. Current research tends to ask these curriculum management questions.

While school administrators were addressing more immediate problems of resources, of school organization, and of adjusting schools and their programs to different student populations, research was supporting them by attending to questions about learning, instructing and other school processes. What is needed at this point is cooperation among local schools that are trying to deal with program assessment, with accrediting agencies, and university-based research centers that have the capacity to support school assessment efforts. Specifically, what the team needs to do is to study existing management and instructional processes within specific schools and to construct a school profile that integrates information about quality of schooling processes and performance outcomes. Using these data, the professionals and laypersons engaged in the school as a community can then assess the school as a functioning unit. The primary question for all concerned parties becomes, how is access to the school's curricula controlled? How is the opportunity to learn managed and what are the consequences?

Instead of thinking of the school's program of studies as an undifferentiated curriculum, it is useful to think of the school as having five types of currriculum, each of which to some degree is subject to the school community's control or management.

1. The General or core curriculum, i.e., that which is required of all students
2. The specialized curricula, e.g., commercial, vocational, gifted and talented, special, alternative
3. Co-curriculum, e.g., publications, sports, hobby clubs, student government
4. Covert curriculum, e.g., learning a local culture and what it means to be a student
5. Learnings in non-school settings, e.g., museums, employment

While schools differ among themselves in the way they make these curricula available to students, individual schools also vary in the way they provide access to these curricula. Of most direct concern is the relation between the general and the special curricula. This relationship is often expressed within departments in terms of the sturcture and sequence of courses. Some schools, for example, structure the sequence of mathematics courses in such a way that students who begin with Math 9 can never have access to Algebra II. In addition to the structure of course sequences, selection and placement within courses further impacts students' access to knowledge.

School assessment, whether emphasizing legal compliance, school quality, or

student outcomes, does not currently deal with these fundamental aspects of curriculum management. At the same time, however, these dimensions of curriculum management could be integrated into school assessment processes, and as a result, generate greater descriptive and analytic power for the evaluation process.

In its most immediate terms, managing the school curricula means planning and monitoring a set of school related experiences for a specific youngster; that is, managing the curriculum means constructing a school experience. While school experiences are in many ways unique to the individuals involved, these experiences also reveal patterns of similarities. When these patterns are determined in advance, we say that students are tracked. While research verifies the existence of well-managed "tracks" for the gifted and for the special students, research has been unable to substantiate the integrity of the so-called "general track." Common experience tells us that not all students in the "general track" have the same school experience; thus, there probably is no such thing as "A" general track. There are instead several general tracks, each representing a different set of experiences within the structure of the curriculum. Instead of thinking of tracks, it is more useful to think of paths through the school. Paths, unlike tracks, are not determined in advance for student placement. Paths represent an analysis of actual school experiences as recorded on student's transcripts. By working backward for a cohort of students and looking for patterns, especially among those students considered to be in the "general track," one can distinguish the meaningful paths through the schools. While teachers currently identify with and meet to plan programs for the gifted and/or the special students or else meet in departments to talk about the "program," seldom do teachers meet to plan the "general track," yet that is where many students spend their school life. After identifying actual experiential paths through the school, school professionals could spend more time planning the series of courses and activities that constitute students experiences and therefore account for school outcomes. A first concern, however, would be with the degree of authority the local school principal and on-site administrative team actually had over the various paths existing in the school. It is popular to believe that the principal has jurisdiction over all activities within the school, when in truth several complete programs may be directed almost entirly by directors in the central officer. By attending to questions of authority in terms of actual experiential paths, school leaders can make the curriculum more manageable. By introducing the notion of "student paths" in the school assessment process, accrediting and registration agencies can strengthen the managerial processes of schools.

Regional accreditation processes, based upon voluntary participation and professionally controlled, have the discretion to exercise strong leadership in developing new school assessment procedures, for example, ones that demonstrate the power of such analytic concepts as "student paths." Accreditation is ordinarily a two stage process: a year long self study by a series of committees using the association's guide and a site visit by a selected team of educators. The process usually follows a ten-year cycle with interim reports. State registration processes most often have shorter time cycles, many relating to annual testing programs. The school assessment process could be strengthened and supplementary processes, such as the use of student paths, could be developed if schools worked in clusters and engaged in assessment as a continuous process. Self-studies and site visits are powerful in-service development activities. If five local schools cooperated in a cluster with support from other agencies, such

as the state and/or a university, a program of self-study and inter-visitation could be developed to focus on the school as the unit of analysis. In any given two year period, one school would conduct a self study and the other four schools would serve as site visitors. In this sequence, key personnel from each school would continuously engage in self-study and visitation to other schools as a professional development program.

Most current school assessment programs find it difficult to deal with the high school as something more than a collection of loosely allied departments and offices. Assessments could consider schools as cultural institutions. In this sense, a school is more than the sum of its parts. The school represents both an historical tradition, a sense of "who we are," and an aspiration, a sense of "what we are trying to become." In judging the school as a cultural institution, the school and its visiting team would need to ask, "Is this school model appropriate in terms of the youth's maturity, the intellectual capital available for education, and the community's beliefs about education?" To assist in this process of judging the school as an institution, the assessors would need access to a typology of schools that served as a guide. In the past, we have described school "types" largely in terms of their organization (senior high, grades 10-12) or the broad sense of purpose (comprehensive high school). These designiations represent formal, structural characteristics, but they do not suggest anything about the ethos or meaning of the school in human terms; that is, they do not describe what the school is trying to be. Much of the research on effective schools and outstanding businesses points to the importance of this institutional set of beliefs, as opposed to any set of specific good practices, as the force that drives organizations towards excellence.

A typology of schools could be developed to account for the schools' basic orientation towards administration and towards instruction. Values that both shape and explain how these basic processes are expressed in the school give rise to an organizational culture. As indicated in Figure 1, we believe that administrative processes reflect one of three basic belief systems, which we refer to as managerial logics. These three belief systems, logics, or perspectives are (1) the bureaucratic-rationalistic, (2) the political-organic, and (3) the cultural. These logics essentially describe the ways schools go about making policy decisions and allocating various kinds of resources -- activities that control student access to knowledge. According to the rationalistic/ bureaucratic logic, a greater standardization of activity is the best assurance of quality performance. Derived historically from Taylor's notion of finding the "one best way" to conduct physical tasks, there is a heavy reliance upon rules and regulations that prescribe the correct way to carry out educational activities. There is a strong emphasis upon the instrumental value of action, with little attention to the quality of the processes. In the political/ organic logic there is a strong sense of need and a concern that the desires of constituencies be represented in specific decisions. Instead of looking for the "one best answer" there is a willingness to adopt what seems to be the most popular alterative, even if it is incompatible or inconsistent with other significant action. Shifting decisions are often made so frequently that verbal actions and operating procedures are widely discrepant. In the symbolic cultural logic, there is an effort to connect changes with prevailng beliefs, to interpret new technologies in terms of continuing values and through the use of cultural elements such as rituals, ceremonies, and stories of significant people to relate the past to current aspirations.

As Popkewitz et al. (1982) noted, the instructional or educational perspective of the school's culture is defined in large part by the meaning participants assign to the basic school concepts: what it means to know and what it means to work. After intensive study of six successful implementers of Wisconsin's reform model, Individually Guided Education (IGE), the researcher identified three distinct school cultures or types -- constructive, technical, and illusory. In technical schools, student achievement is defined in terms of the number of work items completed, such as ditto sheets or work packets, with little concern for the quality, the social significance, or the personal meaning of the tasks. Completion of learning activities is viewed as an end to be sought in its own right. In these school cultures, students believe that they are working "because of..." In other words, they are oriented towards external sources of authority for justifying their own behavior; they act because some one else directs them to do so. Constructive schools, on the other hand, emphasize the creation of knowledge by students, particularly by students working interdependently to achieve a shared objective. Basic skills are seen as tools for solving meaningful problems. In this culture, students believe themselves to be working "in order to..." -- to achieve an objective of their own purpose. In illusory schools, however, there is much "good talk" about the importance of good behavior and the significance of schooling, but instructional time is very often wasted. There is the illusion of teaching and learning, but students seldom encounter substantive content. The predominant instituional culture of a school is defined by the conceptions of "knowing" as they are manifested through the student paths, through those sets or patterns of learning the school provides for student access to knowledge. These norms are reflected in parallel norms about teacher work.

Cultural beliefs or governing norms are revealed when one observes the fundamental processes of the school and asks about the meaning of activities that people engage in while carrying out the tasks of the school. We believe that there are seven distinct school processes, which must be considered in assessing the school as a cultural institution. This set of core studies seeks to understand how institutional leadership and the input of students, teachers, and the community combine to determine the functional processes -- both formal and informal -- through which schools accomplish their goals. These processes, when taken as an interrelated whole, characterize the culture of the school, its institutional character or personality. School culture is the manifestation of what is valued in the universe of the school, and it delineates the range of opportunities open to those who work or study there or who in other ways encounter the institution. Secondary school leaders do not just manage structures and processes; they manage -- and so help to create and sustain -- distinct school cultures. Thus, the objectives for these undertaking these core studies are, first, to describe the nature of secondary schools through study of functional processes and resultant cultures, and second, to examine how those processes and cultures can be managed and improved through effective school leadership. The seven core studies or processes to be considered in the continuing school assessment program are noted below.

Organizing, Planning and Informing - This study would be designed to examine the organization of the high school as an institution which must provide a wide range of educational services to a population of students with a wide range of learning characteristics. Guided by the basic propositions of contingency theory

and organizational processes, this study would focus on the organizational feature of the high school with particular attention to the school's attempt to deal with external and internal uncertainties through the careful management of information on student and staff performance. Particular attention would be paid to the extent of overt planning directed at managing student paths. This study should attempt to develop a model of organizational processes to aid school leaders in designing more effective secondary schools.

Resource Allocation - This study would consider the way in which fiscal and non-fiscal resources are allocated across secondary schools, departments, and groups (or paths) of students and then consider how students and their families make choices to participate in various schools and school programs. The project would provide new perspectives for school managers concerned about the most effective use of resources and for students and parents concerned with maximizing their access to important educational resources.

Curriculum and Instruction - This study would examine the curricular materials and classroom instruction in the schools in their Core Program to develop a greater understanding of the formal and informal curricular program of the school. Particular attention would be devoted to analyses of variation in access to knowledge associated with student paths through high school and to differences in the conceptions of knowledge prominent in high schools in different community context. In viewing instructional processes, the study would attend to how language is used in instructional settings in terms of the cognitive processes and the structure of knowledge. Such focus should stimulate discussion about classroom teaching processes.

Managing Co-Curricular Education - This study would focus on the functioning of co-curricular education in the lives of students and in the institutional context of the school community. The co-curriculum represents the allocation of a broad range of resources, some of which are managed by students and parents in conjunction with the school, but not necessarily under he managerial jurisdiction of the school. This study would examine the linkages between the classroom and co-curricular activities, student engagement in the school as it relates to the co-curriculum, and the role of the teacher as it is extended through participation in the co-curriculum. The basic concern is students' access to the opportunity to learn and exhibit higher level skills, such as problem solving, leadership, and social concern, those objectives that adults say they most want for youngsters, but least often expect to be developed in classroom settings. Finally, attention would be paid to the form and substance of the student government, especially as it relates to efforts to develop a school community.

Guidance Services - This study would be rooted in an understanding of guidance as a human system organized to monitor the flow of information and resources between functional systems and among individuals. Particular attention would be devoted to possible restructuring of the role of the guidance counselor to improve school effectiveness, to the growing concern about student stress, and to the particular difficulties experienced by women and minorities that might be ameliorated by improved guidance services. All of these issues are of concern to school leaders and guidance specialists and all have direct impact on students and their families.

Monitoring and Evaluation - This study would examine the activities and processes engaged in by schools and school districts to monitor and evaluate the performance of students, teachers and administrators. The study of monitoring and evaluation processes would be guided by a theory of evaluation of authority in formal organizations and related theories of organizational control processes. This study would be of interest to school administrators and teachers directly involved in the assessment of student and teacher performance. It would show special concern for the plight of disadvantaged students who traditionally fare poorly with school evaluation systems.

Adolescent Enculturation - This study would be designed to examine how the secondary school fits into the socio-institutional context of the community as it structures adolescent enculturation and socialization to accepted norms and values. The initial emphasis would be on examining different kinds of peer groups and the nature of their influence on adolescents, with the objective of identifying means by which schools could structure peer groups that support the work of the schools. The more complete understanding of adolescent social learning developed in this study should enable educators to take more active approaches to developing coherent and intergrated community social contexts for adolescents.

Administrative leadership at the local school has long been acknowledged as a key to quality education. The notion of the principal as the instructional leader preceeded the effective schools emphasis on "a strong principal." As the current research on effectiveness and the debate about school reform gets clarified, what emerges is a new image of the principal as the institutional manager of students' access to the five curricula of the school community.

We argue that schools are not stable, unchanging organizations, but are constantly subject to internal and external change. Change comes about through staff and student turnover as well as community transition and shifts in government policies. It may be deliberate, such as new state mandated programs, or more subtle, such as curriculum suggestions made by textbook salesmen (Fullan, 1982). Moreover, with respect to change, schools are not unitary organizations; various units of the school develop internal and external linkages of varying strengths and change in different ways and at different rates (Wilson and Corbett, 1983; Miskel, McDonald, and Bloom, 1983). The important question from this perspective is not, "How can we change schools?" but rather, "How can we help school leaders to manage the on-going change process to make schools more effective?" One part of the answer to this question involves recognizing that schools already produce much of the data they need to enable them to know what and how to change. Usually, however, meaningful data are scattered (e.g., in many individual transcripts), or not linked together (e.g., data on teachers with data on students), or difficult to translate into operational terms (Garet and DeLany, 1985). A primary function of school improvement efforts should be to help schools utilize internally generated information more effectively.

What is needed at this point is a cooperative effort to change common modes of thinking about school, in order to improve adolescents' access to knowledge. By attending to the further development of the school registration or accreditation process, it is possible to affect people's thinking in three distinct domains: their analytical thinking, through new concepts such as educational paths that define students' experiences in the school's five

curricula; their empirical thinking, through the development of data-based profiles that describe schools processes in relation to students' experiental paths; and their evaluative thinking, through the assessment of types of school cultures derived from the data-based profiles. What is needed is a strategy that focuses on working cooperatively with selected schools in strategic regional clusters, to develop a data-based conceptualization of performance-related school processes and a focus on student paths through school. Renewed attention to school assessment processes could stimulate collaborative management that assesses current practice in terms of an aspirational model of the school as an institution with a distinct culture.

School assessment, like school change, is and should be so considered, a constant process that involves all of those school officers and allies who are engaged in providing a sense direction to the institution. Instead of thinking of accreditation as a once in ten year event or of a "needs assessment" process as a special event, school should develop much of its existing information into elements of a systematic profile of school life and performance. The elements of schooling should be derived from the several systems outlined above. Continuing efforts to interpret trends or changes in these data, especially the quality of intruction, the degree of engagement, and the consequences of the participation for educational paths, would provide a greater sense of the school's ability to manage its five curricula as changing social systems.

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